

the reading agency

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groupthing.org: engaging young people with reading

Major new website available for subscriber enquiries

A new website where young people creatively engage with reading and words goes into the final stages of development in November. groupthing.org is a major new initiative from The Reading Agency, who develop it with young people. Libraries, schools and youth groups are invited to subscribe now so they can get special subscription rates, time on the site before it goes live in January 2009 and a free promotional print pack.

groupthing.org harnesses the power of Web 2.0 technology to create an online environment open to all young people aged 13 up to 18 – those who consider themselves readers (of magazines, manga, poetry, journalism, fiction, non-fiction, drama) and those who don't – but who are interested in song lyrics, games, film and TV scripts.

Users can set up their own groups, post their own creative content, chat and debate, rate and review, get creative advice, enter competitions and get involved in the site's development. Authors, illustrators, publishers and games designers will drop in to the blog to chat and answer questions.

Behind the scenes, The Reading Agency is working with a range of content partners. These include twelve publishers from the Children's Reading Partners partnership project (see "Notes to editors").

"I was searching for somewhere which gave young people like me the opportunity to see their work in print," says Rachel Benson, 18, one of the young people closely involved in developing the new website. "groupthing.org allows young people a great amount of freedom for expression and creativity. With submissions being in the form of poetry, prose, lyrics or articles, to name but a few, there really is something for everyone. I'm particularly looking forward to the opportunity to hear from those already working in journalism and publishing".

groupthing.org is a safe, post-moderated and easy to use networking site. The site will be fully accessible.

Pat Beech, Manager of the RNIB National Library Service, said: *"All too often, blind and partially sighted young people miss out on the fun of reading so we are delighted to be working with The Reading Agency to help create this exciting accessible website for young readers".*

groupthing.org has a dedicated section for professional subscribers. It will help them share how to engage young people in positive, creative word-based activities.

Subscription package

groupthing.org is available to UK public and school library services, schools and youth services via subscription.

Subscribers to the site will be able to:

- Set up any number of exclusive group pages
- Create 'closed' (invited members only) or open (anyone can join) group pages.
- Advertise events, put in links, add a 'group' friend, do news updates, create polls and use the locator.

Through groupthing.org's section for professionals:

- be part of an online 24/7 professional community
- get news and advance notice of what's coming up on the site
- read regular columns and features and be part of debates about what's affecting young people's engagement with reading, words and creativity
- access competitions, content partner offers and opportunities to engage young people in creating content

Subscribing to groupthing.org will help UK libraries, schools and youth groups develop young people's literacy and reading for pleasure. It can be the platform for regular participation in positive, creative activities and for involving and empowering young people.

"An engagement with reading and writing is crucial to young people's life chances. Because they spend up to 20 hours a week on line we need to reach out to them on their own terms," says Miranda McKearney, Director of The Reading Agency "We're really excited by the potential of groupthing.org - it's going to be a fantastic tool for reaching out to young people who don't see themselves as readers and writers".

For more media information please contact Debbie Hyde, 07956320486 or debbie.hyde@oasismedia.co.uk

Notes to editors

- Subscriber information about groupthing.org is available from Ruth Harrison: ruth.harrison@readingagency.org.uk or can be downloaded from <http://www.readingagency.org.uk/young/groupthing/>
- groupthing.org has been developed by New Bamboo (www.new-bamboo.co.uk), designed by Cog (www.cogdesign.com) and is moderated by Tempero (www.tempero.co.uk)
- The Reading Agency is launching a package of programmes to help libraries deliver the Library Offer for Young People. By delivering the full offer libraries will be improving the outcomes for young people in their area, delivering government policy and making a major contribution towards their local authority's performance against key national indicators which are a part of the national indicator set. From our package of programmes for young people libraries can:
 - subscribe to groupthing.org
 - get young people involved in volunteering, designing library spaces and services through HeadSpace
 - join everything together through our Participate programme
- For general information about The Reading Agency: www.readingagency.org.uk
- RNIB National Library Service is the largest specialist library for blind and partially sighted readers in the UK. It provides over 40,000 fiction and non fiction titles for children and adults in a range of formats including Braille, giant print (24 point type) and unabridged audio (DAISY Talking Books). It also provides free access to online reference material, Braille sheet music, themed book lists and practical support from a team of experienced library staff including a full-time Children's Librarian. www.rnib.org.uk/library
- Children's Reading Partners is a new partnership scheme between children's publishers and librarians. Launched in May 2008, it is led by The Reading Agency and involves 12 children's publishers, The Publishers' Association and the main children's library bodies. Its ultimate aim is to encourage more children to read more, building on a new understanding in the book trade of the strategic significance of libraries' changing work with readers. This understanding has been spearheaded by the work of the original Reading Partners project, also led by The Reading Agency, in which ten leading publishers of adult books have been working in partnership with the UK public library network. More information is available from Naomi Danquah: naomi.danquah@readingagency.org.uk
- The 2008 National Year of Reading is a year-long celebration of reading in all its forms. It aims to build a greater national passion for reading – for children, families and adult learners alike. The Year will encourage people to read in businesses, homes and communities around the country, providing new opportunities to read and helping people to access help and support through schools and libraries. To get involved and sign up to National Year of Reading activities in your area, log on to: www.yearofreading.org.uk